

Message Text

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ACTION H-03

INFO OCT-01 NEA-07 ISO-00 SS-07 NSC-06 AID-01 SSO-00

NSCE-00 A-01 /026 W
----- 005519

O 191819Z APR 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7301
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 2393

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, US, IS, SY, LE
SUBJECT: MEETING OF SENATORS MATHIAS, ABOUREZK AND EAGLETON
WITH PRESIDENT ASAD

1. SENATORS MATHIAS, ABOUREZK AND EAGLETON, ACCCOMPANIED
BY AMBASSADOR, HAD TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASAD
APRIL 18. IMPORTANT POINTS OF CONVERSATION ARE SUMMARIZED
BELOW. THIS SUMMARY HAS NOT BEEN CLEARED WITH CODELS.
MEMCON BEING POUCHED NEA.

2. THE MIDDLE EAST.

SENATOR EAGLETON ASKED, ASSUMING THAT ASAD'S POLICY
IN LEBANON WORKED AND THAT FURTHER STEP-BY-STEP DIPLOMACY
WAS NOT POSSIBLE, WHAT PRACTICAL APPROACH MIGHT BE
FOLLOWED TO ACHIEVE A SETTLEMENT? ASAD REPLIED
HE HAD READ RECENT STATEMENT BY SECRETARY KISSINGER
THAT HE THOUGHT STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH WAS NOW OUT OF
QUESTION. WHAT WAS NEEDED NOW, ASAD SAID, WAS
OVERALL SETTLEMENT. ALL PARTIES COULD GO TO GENEVA
OR MAYBE A DRAFT PLAN FOR OVERALL SETTLEMENT SHOULD
BE PROPOSED AND THEN ALL PARTIES GO TO GENEVA.
SHOULD U.S. PROPOSE SUCH A PLAN, EAGLETON ASKED.

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POSSIBLY, ASAD REPLIED, PROVIDED PLAN WAS PRECISE AND

JUST. IT WOULD BE VERY DANGEROUS FOR A SUPERPOWER TO PROPOSE A DEFICIENT PLAN. AS TO ELEMENTS OF A JUST PLAN, ASAD SAID, WHEN SYRIA HAD AGREED TO UNSC RES 338 IT WAS ON BASIS OF FULL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND GUARANTEES OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS.

3. MATHIAS ASKED HOW ANY PLAN COULD COPE WITH NUMBER OF PALESTINIANS INVOLVED. WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS COULD BE TAKEN TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTING UNSC RES 242? ASAD SAID COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WAS REQUIRED, INCLUDING TOTAL WITHDRAWAL, CREATION OF PALESTINIAN STATE AND ENDING STATE OF WAR. SUCH A PLAN WOULD ALSO PROVIDE SOLUTION FOR PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN ACCORDANCE WITH UN RESOLUTIONS. NO MIRACLE WAS REQUIRED IF THE WILL FOR PEACE EXISTED. BASICALLY, IT WAS PROBLEM FOR U.S. HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR U.S. ISRAEL COULD NOT HAVE REJECTED ALL SOLUTIONS THE WAY IT HAS. IN RESPONSE FURTHER QUESTION ASAD SAID THAT NUMBERS WHO WOULD ACTUALLY RETURN WOULD BE MATTER FOR PLO TO DISCUSS. ARAFAT HAD TALKED WITH SEVERAL CONGRESSMEN AND HAD TOLD THEM "LET US FIRST ESTABLISH A PALESTINIAN STATE." ARAFAT HAD ALSO TOLD THEM HIS IDEA WAS THEN FOR PEACEFUL STRUGGLE FOR SECULAR STATE OF PALESTINE SHARED BY ARABS AND JEWS. PERHAPS, ASAD ADDED, NEW IDEAS WILL EMERGE. WHAT IF, FOR EXAMPLE, JEWS ORIGINALLY FROM ARAB COUNTRIES WERE TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES? ARAB COUNTRIES WOULD ACCEPT THEM BACK AND ISRAEL WOULD THEN HAVE TO ACCEPT PALESTINIANS BACK IN THEIR HOMES. SUCH INTERMINGLING COULD CREATE BETTER UNDERSTANDING. WE KNOW, HE NOTED, THAT MAJORITY OF JEWS AFROM ARAB COUNTRIES ARE NOT TREATED ON EQUAL FOOTING IN ISRAEL. IN CONDITIONS OF PEACE, LARGE PERCENTAGE OF THEM WOULD RETURN TO ARAB COUNTRIES.

4. LEBANON.

ASAD SAID SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD LEBANON WAS NOT BASED ON CONFESSITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS. SOME ACCUSED SYRIA OF SIDING WITH CHRISTIANS WHILE MAJORITY OF SYRIANS ARE MUSLIMS, BUT SYRIA BELIEVES ITS ATTITUDE IS ONE OF JUSTICE.

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5. ABOUREZK ASKED WHY ISRAEL HAD NOT REACTED TO SENDING OF SYRIAN TROOPS INTO LEBANON? ASAD REPLIED, "ASK DR. KISSINGER. U.S. IS PLAYING A ROLE IN LEBANON." ASAD SAID U.S. WAS TRYING TO PREVENT SYRIA FROM INTERVENING IN LEBANON. ESSENCE OF THE MANY MESSAGES WHICH HAD BEEN CONVEYED TO HIM BY AMBASSADOR HAD BEEN THAT IT WOULD BE DANGEROUS FOR SYRIA TO SEND IN TROOPS. U.S. WAS AGAINST SYRIAN

INTERVENTION. SYRIA TAKES IT FOR GRANTED, ASAD ADDED, THAT ISRAEL ALSO OPPOSES ITS INTERVENTION. REGARDLESS OF THIS ATTITUDE, HOWEVER, AND EVEN IF ISRAEL WERE TO TAKE ACTION, SYRIA WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY ITS ROLE, SINCE LEBANESE AND SYRIANS ARE ONE PEOPLE. THE U.S., HE SAID AGAIN, WAS INVOLVED IN LEBANESE EVENTS AND SYRIA WISHED IT WERE NOT. ASKED ABOUT NATURE OF U.S. INVOLVEMENT, ASAD REPLIED THAT "U.S. WAS CREATING TENSION IN LEBANON." HE SAID HE SAW CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN EVENTS IN LEBANON AND SINAI AGREEMENT. THIS, HE ADDED, WAS REASON WHY U.S. AND ISRAEL INTENDED TO PREVENT SYRIA FROM INTERVENING, DESPITE FACT THAT SYRIA WOULD GO IN MERELY TO STOP THE FIGHTING. ALL LEBANESE SIDES TRUST US, ASAD ASSERTED. "IN GOING IN WE WOULD BE RESPONDING TO DESIRES OF NINETY PERCENT OF LEBANESE, INCLUDING CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS, AND ALSO THE PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER, AND MANY DEPUTIES."

6. EAGLETON ASKED IF ASAD HAD ANY HARD EVIDENCE OF ISRAELI MEDDLING IN LEBANON TO PROLONG CIVIL WAR. YES, ASAD REPLIED THEY ARE WORKING THROUGH THEIR AGENTS. ISRAEL, HE SAID, HAD HISTORICAL AMBITION TO PARTITION LEBANON, BOTH FOR IDEOLOGICAL AND FOR MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS. ISRAEL WAS A RACIST STATE AND HAD MADE RELIGION BASIS OF STATE, EVEN THOUGH THIS WAS AGAINST SPIRIT OF THE AGE. ISRAEL WANTED TO CREATE MINI-STATES LIKE ITSELF TO PROVE THAT CO-EXISTENCE BETWEEN RELIGIONS WAS IMPOSSIBLE. THIS EXPLAINED WHY ISRAEL WAS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT LEBANESE CRISIS.
TO SAY THAT SYRIAN INTERVENTION WOULD THREATEN CONFLICT BETWEEN SYRIAN AND ISRAELI TROOPS MADE NO SENSE SINCE THEY WERE ALREADY CONFRONTING EACH OTHER ON GOLAN. LIKEWISE, IT WAS FOOLISH TO SAY THAT SYRIAN INTERVENTION MIGHT ENCOURAGE FEDAYEEN BECAUSE FEDAYEEN
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ALREADY HAD FULL FREEDOM OF ACTION IN LEBANON.

7. SYRIA AND LEBANON WERE TWO ARAB COUNTRIES BOTH IN STATE OF WAR WITH ISRAEL, ASAD CONTINUED. BOTH WERE MEMBERS OF ARAB LEAGUE AND ADHERED TO ITS JOINT DEFENSE AGREEMENT. ASAD SAID HE WAS IN DAILY TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH LEBANESE PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER. HE COULD ASK TO INTERVENE OR BE ASKED TO INTERVENE. THIS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH BALANCE OF POWER IN REGION. THREATS FROM ISRAEL ONLY SHOWED ITS DESIRE TO STRIKE AT ANY ARAB COUNTRY AND ISRAEL HAD STARTED WITH LEBANON BECAUSE LEBANON WAS NOT THE ARAB WORLD'S WEAKEST LINK. SYRIA COULD ONLY INTERPRET AMERICAN ATTITUDE AS FAVORING THESE ISRAELI INTENTIONS. ARAB PROBLEMS, ASAD STRESSED, HAD NO RELATION TO NON-ARABS AND PROBLEM OF LEBANON WAS AN INTRA-ARAB ONE.

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INFO OCT-01 NEA-07 ISO-00 SS-07 NSC-06 AID-01 SSO-00

NSCE-00 A-01 /026 W

----- 005651

O 191819Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7302

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 2393

8. AT THIS POINT AMBASSADOR INTERVENED TO SAY THAT
HE WISHED TO REPEAT THAT U.S. CONCERN HAD BEEN TO SHARE WITH
PRESIDENT OUR FRANK UNDERSTANDING OF ISRAELI ATTITUDES.
SEEN THROUGH ISRAEL'S EYES, EVENTS IN LEBANON HAD
DIRECT BEARING ON ITS NATIONAL SECURITY.
U.S. COULD NOT BE GUARANTOR OF ISRAELI
BEHAVIOR, WHEN IT FELT ITS SECURITY THREATENED.

9. SYRIAN JEWS.

SENATOR ABOUREZK COMMENTED THAT MIKE WALLACE SHOW
ON SYRIAN JEWS HAD PRESENTED GOOD IMAGE OF SYRIA AND
PRESIDENT ASAD. ASAD REPLIED THAT SYRIA DID NOT HAVE
RELIGIOUS FANATICISM BETWEEN CITIZENS. IF JEWS WERE
SOMETIMES REGARDED IN A CERTAIN LIGHT THIS WAS FAULT
OF ZIONISM IN TRYING TO IN-GATHER ALL JEWS. SYRIAN STATE
HAD NOTHING AGAINST ANY SYRIAN JEW AS A JEW BUT ONLY
AGAINST SYRIAN JEW WHO MIGHT THINK OF HIMSELF AS OTHER
THAN SYRIAN. SAME REASONING APPLIED TO CHRISTIANS AND
MUSLIMS. ONE MUST BE LOYAL TO ONE'S COUNTRY. LIKEWISE,
ASAD ADDED, SYRIA HAD NOTHING AGAINST U.S. JEWS BUT ONLY
THOSE AMONG THEM WHO GAVE THEIR LOYALTY TO ISRAEL AND
NOT TO U.S. IT WAS NOT NATURAL FOR A CITIZEN TO GIVE UP
HIS LOYALTY TO HIS OWN COUNTRY.

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10. IN CLOSING, SENATOR MATHIAS COMMENTED THAT WHEN HE VISITED DAMASCUS OVER A YEAR AGO HE HAD BEEN FIRST MEMBER OF SENATOR TO DO SO. NOW THREE SENATORS WERE VISITING -- TWO OF THEM DEMOCRATS. THIS DEMONSTRATED THAT WHATEVER MIGHT BE RESULT OF U.S. ELECTION, THERE WAS VERY REAL INTEREST IN U.S. IN HELPING ACHIEVE JUST SETTLEMENT. PROCESSOF EDUCATION WAS GOING SLOWLY FORWARD. THIS WAS ONE OF THE REASONS HE HAD VISITED WITH ARAFAT. SPEAKING PERSONALLY, HE WOULD HATE TO SEE ANY INCIDENT WHICH MIGHT DISRUPT THIS PROCESS OF ON-GOING EDUCATION. SUCH AN INCIDENT MIGHT LEAD THE U.S. TO REACT ALONG OLD LINES OF POLICY BEFORE NEW ONES HAD BEEN LAID DOWN. ASAD SAID HE AGREED WITH THE SENATOR AND HE WAS PLEASED TO HAVE U.S. CONGRESSMEN VISIT SYRIA AND GAIN BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF REGION AND PROBLEM. AS CONGRESSMEN STUDIES SITUATION, THEY WOULD BECOME MORE AWARE THAT U.S. INTERESTS IN BOTH SHORT AND LONG TERM WERE WITH THE ARABS. MATHIAS SAID HE WOULD BE GOING TO JERUSALEM IN A FEW DAYS AND WHILE THERE HE WOULD REPEAT TO RABIN WHAT HE HAD TOLD HIM A YEAR AGO -- THAT IN HIS JUDGMENT AMERICAN PEOPLE WOULD NOT SUPPORT ANY KIND OF PREEMPTIVE ACTION BY ISRAEL NOR WOULD THEY SUPPORT ANY DISRUPTION IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A POSITIVE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN AMERICAN AND ARAB PEOPLES.

11. SENATORS REQUEST COPIES OF THIS MESSAGE BE PROVIDED THEIR OFFICES.

MURPHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CODELS, PEACE PLANS, LIBERATION FRONTS, CIVIL DISORDERS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976DAMASC02393
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760148-0144
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760448/aaaabooie.tel
Line Count: 258
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION H
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 MAY 2004 by woolfihd>; APPROVED <22 SEP 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING OF SENATORS MATHIAS, ABOUREZK AND EAGLETON WITH PRESIDENT ASAD
TAGS: PFOR, US, IS, SY, LE, (ASAD, HAFIZ), (MATHIAS, CHARLES MCC JR), (ABOUREZK, JAMES), (EAGLETON, THOMAS F), (ARAFAT, YASSER)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006